

IMPROVING the Education of TOMORROW'S Journalists



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Carnegie Corporation of New York was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote “the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.” Under Carnegie’s will, grants must benefit the people of the United States, although up to 7.4 percent of the funds may be used for the same purpose in countries that are or have been members of the British Commonwealth, with a current emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa. As a grantmaking foundation, the Corporation seeks to carry out Carnegie’s vision of philanthropy, which he said should aim “to do real and permanent good in this world.” Currently, the foundation focuses its work in four program areas: Education, International Development, International Peace and Security and Strengthening U.S. Democracy.

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*Our liberty cannot be guarded but by
the freedom of the press, nor that be limited
without danger of losing it.*

—Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 1786

Understood as central to the strength and vitality of American democracy, the press—an institution outside government—was included among the civic organizations and activities to be protected by the Bill of Rights. A free press, the founders believed, was essential to keeping watch on the affairs of government and creating an active, politically informed public.

The role of the U.S. news media, however, has never been simple. In the early days of the Republic, when press outlets were openly owned by or affiliated with competing political interests, the field of journalism was rife with contest. Many newspapers of that era, instead of being exemplars of truth and fair play, were replete with vitriol and distortion. Indeed, there was little expectation that an objective truth be reported; it was in the variety and multiplicity of voices that the facts could emerge.

As our nation goes forward into its third century, it has become increasingly difficult for journalists and journalism to carry out the responsibilities of the profession implicit in the language of the First Amendment while meeting the inexorable demands of a competitive marketplace. In a recent poll by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, fewer than one in four individuals said they believe all or most of what they read or see on television news shows, which, along with newspapers—both pillars of the industry—have suffered damaging blows to the credibility of their reports. This unimpressive view of journalism is reflected in the academic world, where schools of journalism have never achieved the stature long enjoyed by

schools that prepare students for medicine, law, architecture, business and other careers.

Preserving the critical relationship between democracy and the press depends, in large part, on the quality of America's journalists. What our nation needs and expects is a profession comprising educated, informed, ethical and skilled individuals.

Troubled by recent trends, Carnegie Corporation of New York invited journalism deans from five leading research universities to consider the role of the academy in a national effort to revitalize journalism education and strengthen the capacity of the profession to fulfill its obligations to our citizenry and our democracy. Vartan Gregorian, president of the Corporation, enlisted the consulting firm McKinsey & Co., on a pro bono basis, to explore the views of news industry leaders—publishers, presidents, chairmen, editors, anchors, senior correspondents and producers—about the state of journalism education and what journalism schools might do to elevate the profession's standards and status. The purpose of the interviews, President Gregorian explained, was to “give a baseline foundation for America's leading deans to craft a curriculum that will advance what we all hold dear: a free and independent press that ensures an informed public and a vital democracy.”

Geoffrey Sands, director, McKinsey & Co., led a team that conducted 40 one-on-one interviews during summer 2004 and prepared a report for the Corporation on improving the education of tomorrow's journalists. The interviews were conducted in confidence; the names of the individuals interviewed appear at the end of this summary.

While the McKinsey team discovered some disagreement among news executives and journalists about the nature and causes of current trends in the field, there was broad agreement that the implications of those trends are profound and the current skill requirements for journalists very different from when the participants began their own careers. Where journalism schools (J schools) fit into the new environment, according to the interviewees, is uncertain. Some news leaders responded with indifference when asked about

the value of J schools, while others felt that J schools are the surest and most reliable path of entry into the profession. All participants, regardless of their attitude toward J schools, had suggestions for how schools can respond to today's challenges. The following summary encapsulates the McKinsey findings.

Start with the Basics—and a Strong Sense of Ethics

News industry leaders agreed that profound changes are taking place in the news business that pose challenges for journalists and the news organizations for which they work. The interviewees spoke with passion and conviction about the skills that colleges and universities should impart to future journalists. Their advice can be grouped into three broad prescriptions:

- Emphasize the basics of the journalism craft, along with analytical thinking and a strong sense of ethics;
- Help reporters build specialized expertise to enhance their coverage of complex beats from medicine to economics, and help them to acquire first-hand knowledge of the societies, languages, religions and cultures of other parts of the world;
- Channel the best writers, the most curious reporters and the most analytical thinkers into the profession of journalism.

Some of the participants were convinced that the quality of journalism is losing ground in the drive for profit, diminished objectivity and the spread of the “entertainment virus.” Print reporters and business executives were more sanguine about the quality of today's reporting than their broadcast counterparts.

Most of the news leaders interviewed concurred that future journalists will face more obstacles to high-quality reporting, be asked to adapt to more immediate, yet longer (24/7) news cycles and need to find ways to reach audiences that have more options than ever before for accessing news and

information. The next generation of journalists must be prepared to cover more complex subjects and master new technologies.

The quest for profits and audience. The majority of interviewees agreed that the most critical responsibility of journalists is to serve the public interest and protect our democracy. They parted company on the issue of whether profit pressure and the pursuit of larger audiences have affected their news operations. Some are convinced that the focus on profits drives down standards, while others believe that it is possible to maximize profits *and* serve the public interest.

Many said the current emphasis on celebrities, trials and other superficial news detracts from serious television news coverage. Others noted, however, that the success of media outlets has always relied on how many readers or viewers a publication or network can attract. The challenge for journalism and journalists is to find ways to interest readers and viewers in news that is vital to a functioning democracy.

Objectivity. The concern over the perceived loss of objectivity was described by many of the news industry leaders as nothing new—and a circumstance that exists as a mere shadow of the inflammatory pamphlets and newspaper smear campaigns of the first days of U.S. democracy. Others think much of the news has too much “edge,” particularly from “talking head” shows on cable news.

The Internet is a megaphone for many voices, and allows for the creation of more partisan outlets. Some interviewees were concerned that this “cacophony of voices,” as one newspaper editor put it, may cloud the public’s understanding of what constitutes good journalism.

Engaging distracted, fickle audiences. Interviewees said that competition from hundreds of TV stations, satellite radio and the Internet makes it tougher to win audiences. A shorter attention span among the public forces reporters to make the news fast and exciting. This pressure extends to print media: even

great newspapers are struggling to keep readers. Some participants said that reporters drive readers away with long-winded stories that fail to grab readers' attention or convey why it is important for a citizen to grasp the issue at hand. One newspaper executive said, "People have less time. We have to be compelling to the person who has 20 minutes and to the person with one hour without 'dumbing down' the newspaper."

The need for mastery. Reporters need to know even more about complex beats if they are to deliver stories that are both shorter and more interesting. Whether reporting on the economy, medical advances or the government, reporters need to provide not just facts but context. "*Explaining* the debate over whether we should have a director of national intelligence is much more important than just *reporting* the debate," said one participant.

In a progressively more interconnected world, the complexity of stories reporters must cover will only increase, most interviewees believed. As examples, they pointed to the Middle East, China's burgeoning economic might, difficult questions of medical ethics, scientific breakthroughs and changing global demographics.

Some of the news leaders bewailed what they consider "a crisis of confidence" within journalism. Many said that when they became journalists, they viewed the profession as a vocation and public service, not a business, but the business pressures today are inescapable. Others worry that young people aspire to become on-air television reporters and anchors without first mastering the skills of hard news reporting. Several said the next generation will need even more motivation and "fire in the belly" to become good journalists.

Today's Journalism Schools

The news executives and journalists who were interviewed were uncertain where journalism schools fit into this new environment. Some believe a degree

in journalism is unnecessary. One suggested that working on the student newspaper is sufficient preparation. Some editors and executives responsible for hiring expressed indifference about a student's major in college. Many news organizations depend on their own intern or desk assistant programs, not college curricula, to cultivate talent. Some promising newcomers "have journalism degrees, but others do not," a newspaper editor said.

Still, some interviewees saw promise in both the academic preparation of J schools and the credential they offer. One called it "the only way" to break into the television news business. Another praised J schools for teaching students how to work in teams to finish a story.

The journalism curriculum. Many of those interviewed credited journalism schools with doing a good job of teaching basic reporting skills, particularly when classes are taught by seasoned journalists. Others think schools need to do a better job of imparting values, building critical thinking and analytical skills and developing specialized expertise. They cautioned that schools ought not to become too narrowly focused, by teaching, for example, only broadcast skills at the expense of core writing or reporting skills.

News leaders strongly support the idea that journalism schools should be creative in developing new curricula to better meet the needs of a rapidly changing profession. Online newspaper web sites require newspaper reporters to hit the kind of around-the-clock news cycles once faced only by wire service reporters. Among the key items on the "to do" list that the news leaders prescribed for J schools were these:

- Teaching basic reporting and writing skills, as well as the paramount importance of getting the facts right.
- Developing news judgment and analytical skills, including the ability to separate fact from opinion and use statistics correctly. As one interviewee put it, "An astonishing amount of journalism requires strategic thinking and planning."

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- Mastering specialized expertise and critical language skills (e.g. economics, medical research, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi).
 - Raising admission standards and helping the best and brightest land challenging jobs.

The ethics of journalism. Many interviewees suggested that journalism schools cannot overemphasize the importance of upholding the ethics of journalism. They believe that the ethical ramifications of journalism must be infused throughout the curriculum, not just taught in ethics classes.

There were also suggestions that J schools take on a larger role in providing continuing education for the profession, much like business schools do, in which they would regularly bring in top editors and executives and rank-and-file journalists for seminars or longer programs designed to allow them to broaden their knowledge and take time to reflect on important issues.

Many leaders said they also look to journalism schools to help bring more diversity to their news rooms. They cited a need for newsroom staffs to be more representative of America if news organizations are to improve their ability to cover stories and engage new audiences.

Participants expressed the belief that J schools should focus on turning out top-quality journalists, rather than on critiquing the news industry and developing new reporting techniques, which have less impact on good journalism than do high-quality teaching and improved curricula.

To better prepare students for the fast paced, around-the-clock news business, some thought that journalism schools should look at the medical school model of grueling internships and residencies. They also encouraged journalism educators to consider dual-degree programs with other professional schools and academic departments on their campuses.

The McKinsey report, which captures the insights of many of the best and brightest of the current generation of news executives, editors and correspondents, has bolstered the case for and strengthened the resolve of Vartan

Gregorian and the journalism deans to undertake a bold effort to reshape and reinvigorate the quality of education that journalism schools offer. With their guidance and the support of Carnegie Corporation of New York and John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the deans who comprise the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education will share with fellow educators and the general public their blueprint for curricular reforms and other changes. In so doing, they hope to ensure that tomorrow's journalists possess the skills needed to continue the legacy of playing an essential and honorable role in keeping America "the land of the free."

List of Interviewees

Margot Adler	Correspondent, National Public Radio
Christiane Amanpour	Chief International Correspondent, CNN
Phil Balboni	President and Founder, New England Cable News
Dan Balz	National Political Correspondent, <i>Washington Post</i>
Fred Barnes	Executive Editor, <i>Weekly Standard</i>
Amanda Bennett	Editor and Executive VP, <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>
Tom Bettag	Executive Producer, <i>Nightline</i> , ABC News
The Honorable Michael Bloomberg	Mayor of New York City
Carol Bradley	Executive VP, <i>Great Falls Tribune</i>
John S. Carroll	Executive VP and Editor, <i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Kathleen Carroll	Senior VP and Executive Editor, Associated Press
Christopher Cuomo	Correspondent, ABC News
Leonard Downie Jr.	Executive Editor, <i>Washington Post</i>
James Fallows	National Correspondent, <i>Atlantic Monthly</i>
Alix M. Freedman	Reporter, <i>Wall Street Journal</i>
Jack Fuller	President (retired), Tribune Publishing
Donald E. Graham	Chairman, <i>Washington Post</i>
Andrew Heyward	President, CBS News
James F. Hoge Jr.	Editor, <i>Foreign Affairs</i>
Eason Jordon	Chief News Executive (former), CNN
Richard Kaplan	President, MSNBC
Jim Kelly	Managing Editor, <i>Time</i>

Kevin Klose	President and CEO, National Public Radio
Paula Madison	President and General Manager, KNBC-TV
Bill Moyers	Host (former), <i>NOW with Bill Moyers</i> , PBS
Donald E. Newhouse	President, Advance Publications
Susan Page	Washington Bureau Chief, <i>USA Today</i>
Richard D. Parsons	Chairman and CEO, Time Warner
Norman Pearlstine	Editor-in-Chief, Time Inc.
Gary B. Pruitt	President and CEO, McClatchy Co.
P. Anthony Ridder	Chairman and CEO, Knight Ridder
Sandy Rowe	Editor, <i>Oregonian</i>
Maria Elena Salinas	Co-anchor, Univision
Neal Shapiro	President, NBC News
Stephen B. Shepard	Editor-in-Chief (retired), <i>Business Week</i>
Lesley Stahl	Anchor, <i>48 hours Investigates</i> , CBS News
Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr.	Publisher, <i>New York Times</i>
Rone Tempest	Staff Writer, <i>Los Angeles Times</i>
David Westin	President, ABC News
Mark Whitaker	Editor, <i>Newsweek</i>

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